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ABSTRACT

This study explores perceptions of 2-year college presidents regarding both strengths and weaknesses of fiscal policies. Questionnaires sent to a random sample of 350 presidents contained five questions pertaining to most and least effective aspects of their state's fiscal policies and desired changes in state, federal, and community funding policies. Results of the survey indicated that: (1) fiscal and financial structures under which the community colleges are operating lack necessary flexibility; and (2) the significance of continuing education, community services, and remedial education is denied by fiscal policy. It was concluded that if the community college hopes to fulfill its philosophy of extending the opportunities for higher education to a larger segment of the population, then the appropriate financial resources will have to be made available to facilitate this growth. (RN)

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE FISCAL POLICIES: PRESIDENTS' VIEWS

1971

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Systematic inquiry often serves only to re-inforce what clairvoyant practitioners have known all along. Yet such investigations are necessary exercises in massing data that inform on decision making.

Currently in the wind is the expression of widespread dissatisfaction with fiscal policies related to the financing of public two-year colleges. The results of a survey conducted by the University of Massachusetts would seem to offer some credence to these expressions of dissatisfaction. Moreover, the data reveal how fiscal practices and avowed institutional missions are working at cross purposes across the nation.

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The study sought to establish modes of perception on the part of knowledgeable practitioners (i.e., two-year college presidents) as regards both strengths and weaknesses of prevailing fiscal policies. Hard data on patterns of state support (Arney, 1970) and specific program costs and

cost differentials (Wattenbarger, 1970) have identified some of the givens of the problem context. While the polling of expert opinions provides softer data than that already registered, such activity was viewed by the research team as the next logical step in an effort to shed more light on an increasingly important problem.

Presidents of 350 publically financed two-year institutions were randomly selected to participate in the study. To insure equal representation from each of the geographic regions in the continental United States twenty percent of the colleges in each state were sampled. No fewer than two institutions from any one state were sampled, regardless of the percentage. The Presidents in the sample were sent the same questionnaire. It contained the following five questions:

A. What is the most effective aspect of your state's fiscal policy as it relates to the funding of your operation?

B. What is the least effective aspect of your state's fiscal policy as it relates to the funding of your operation?

C. If you could change one aspect of your state's funding policies, what specifically would you change?

D. What change, if any, in federal funding policies do you see as necessary to the growth and improvement of community colleges?

E. What change, if any, in community financial policies do you see as necessary to the growth and improvement of community colleges?

A data reduction procedure was employed in order to appropriately analyze the voluminous responses. A separate categorizing system was developed for each item. The categories were not predetermined, but rather emanated from the actual responses. Descriptive statistics and the corresponding implications were then generated. (See Tables I - V).

A cross-tabulation of items A and B revealed that 54 of the 85 Presidents in A-2 (specific amount funded each year) were included in category B-4 (state share does not reflect true cost). This implies that although they were satisfied with the idea of being funded a specific amount each year (usually determined by a formula), they saw a need to make the formula more realistic in terms of reflecting the true costs for all students the institutions intended to serve.

The coded responses to questions A - E are presented in Tables I - V. Any categories representing fewer than five percent of the respondents are not considered separately and are classified as OTHER. As may be seen by consulting these tables, the majority of the college Presidents stated that an annual specified appropriation was the most effective aspect of their state's fiscal policy. Section B (Table II) reveals that 52.6 percent of those responding feel that the state share of funds does not reflect true cost and need. Section C (Table III) shows the significant categories re-

flecting which aspect of the state's funding policy ought to be changed on manifold. As expected, a plurality of the Presidents wanted an increase. Such a consideration also presented itself in the response set for item D (Change in Federal Funding Policies). However, four other categories appeared to be equally important. They referred to the manner in which the funds should be appropriated. It is interesting to note that over eight percent of the Presidents recommended the deletion of local funding in response to item E. Additionally 13.5 percent were concerned with the local property owners' tax burden.

The results of the survey were enlightening in terms of the stated mission of the community college, which is to extend the opportunity for higher education to all citizens. What shows through analysis was that the fiscal and financial structures under which the community colleges are operating lack the flexibility they should have for the changing patterns of education in the United States. The state and/or local governments that have been funding the community colleges have forced upon them a "neo-isolationism" which keeps the institutions bound to serving the needs of only a small segment of the community -- the eighteen to twenty-two age groups -- who have both the time and indecision to pursue their studies at the local college. What they end up doing through the only programs they can afford to offer is to foster the development of an education elite

on the local level.

What is obvious to the authors is that the significance of continuing education, community services, and remedial (developmental) education is being denied by fiscal policy. The Master Plan Study Committee on Continuing Education and Community Services of the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education points out the importance of these areas by stating that:

> The importance of Continuing Education cannot be over-emphasized. The increasing technological and political complexity makes obsolete many types of employment and calls for retraining for other jobs at an ever increasing rate. This required education at the college level which up until now has been limited to an elite which could afford both the money and primarily the time to achieve it. If we wish to extend the American concept of universal education, we must be able to make available courses (both credit and non-credit) which could be offered at convenient times for those people whose major time is spent in earning a living.[1]

It seems clear that the general public is becoming increasingly aware of the need for acquiring skills and knowledge in a complex society when one looks at the statistics comparing part-time students with full-time students.

Not until 1966 did the full-time student enrollment in community colleges surpass the numbers of people taking part-time courses. Up until this time, part-time students who most

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[1]Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, "Report and Recommendations of the Study Committee on Continuing Education and Community Services," 1971.

usually attended college through the continuing education or community services programs, outnumbered their full-time counterparts by an annual average of approximately 55,000.[2] It is important to remember that these people were and still are, generally much older, often have sizable families, work full-time, and are feeling the financial pressures of living in a highly inflationary period.

All too often people in the community who wish to continue their education are forced to pay between 2 1/2 and 3 times the tuition asked of the full-time day student. In addition, "While the evening continuing education school is expected to show a surplus, any surplus so achieved is assigned to the day school and is therefore not available for the development of experimental courses or for a quick response to a community need."[3]

What is true for the areas of community services and continuing education is also quite true for the remedial education programs designed for the high risk students in the community college. William Moore states, "The fact is, programs for high risk students in the community college get 'welfare funding,' that is, there are never enough funds to meet the needs of the recipients. It is not atypical to

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[2]Leland L. Medsker and Dale Tilley, Breaking the Access Barriers, (Berkley: Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1971), p. 28.

[3]Mass. Board of Higher Education, op. cit.

have a developmental program funded by agencies and other sources outside the college (government, foundation, and so on) and when the funding stops the program is discontinued."[4]

At a time when continuing education, community services, and developmental programs are becoming academically legitimate tasks for universities in general and community colleges in particular to be involved in, it is tremendously disturbing to think of the ways in which financial arrangements are allowed to encumber and repress the growth and realization of the potential that the programs have for truly meeting the needs of the people.

While the results of the survey point out some rather interesting facts, it is apparent that all of the problems that Presidents perceived with their funding arrangements were not brought to the surface.

This survey has facilitated planning for further studies in this area. At the present time the authors are planning a follow-up survey which will be designed to get at more specifically the feelings of the community college Presidents on their financial situation.

Finally, it is interesting to note that in a special report on the nation's community colleges, The Open-Door Colleges (1970), the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education

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[4]William Moore, Against the Odds, (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1970), p. 154.

predicts that the "community college enrollment will continue to grow rapidly in the 1970's (and) although enrollment may level off or decline in the 1980's for demographic reasons, it seems probable by the year 2000, community colleges will be both more numerous and more broadly distributed geographically."[5] The Commission goes much further to recommend that by 1976 a community college within commuting distance of every potential student be established, and by 1980 at least 40 percent of all undergraduate students be enrolled in community colleges.[6]

This planned growth activity over the next two decades is, however, dependent upon the financial support received from federal, state, and local government. If the community college in the United States hopes to deliver on its often stated philosophy and objectives of extending the opportunity for higher education to a much larger segment of the population, both young and old, the "appropriate" financial resources will have to be made available to facilitate this growth.

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[5] The Open-Door Colleges--Policies for Community Colleges. (Hightstown, N. J.: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1970). A special report and recommendations by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education.

[6] Ibid., pp. 51-52.

CATEGORIZED RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS

N = 156

TABLE I

(A) What is the most effective aspect of your state's fiscal policy as it relates to the funding of your operation?

		Frequency	Percent
1.	Funding of total operation	26	16.7
2.	Specific amount funded each year	85	54.5
3.	Arrangement satisfactory	14	9.0
4.	Other (8 categories)	31	19.8

TABLE II

(B) What is the least effective aspect of your state's fiscal policy as it relates to the funding of your operation?

		Frequency	Percent
1.	Not enough funds	16	10.3
2.	Appropriations received late	10	6.4
3.	Too much paper work and red tape	13	8.3
4.	State share of funds (per student, credit hour) does not reflect true cost and need	82	52.6
5.	Requires legislative approval and review	11	7.1
6.	Other (5 categories)	24	15.3

TABLE III

(C) If you could change one aspect of your state's funding policies, what specifically would you change?

		Frequency	Percent
1.	Fund on basis of program need rather than percentage allocations	10	6.4
2.	Total state funding	9	5.8
3.	Make provisions for funding	8	5.1
4.	Establish firm date for determination of appropriations	16	10.3
5.	More simplified formula and more reliance on F.T.E. projection	8	5.1
6.	Increase state aid or state share	44	28.2
7.	Change format to reflect special needs of community college: community service, occupational education, remedial education, and continuing education	26	16.7
8.	Lack of flexibility	9	5.8
9.	Other (6 categories)	26	16.7

TABLE IV

(D) What change, if any, in federal funding policies do you see as necessary to the growth and improvement of community colleges?

		Frequency	Percent
1.	Funding specifically for community colleges	18	11.5
2.	Block grants to institutions--not categorical grants	29	18.6
3.	Federal funding directly to community	28	17.9
4.	Standard formula for funding institutions and needed programs (remedial, aid to disadvantaged and needy students)	22	14.1
5.	Increase capitol funding	25	16.0
6.	Other (8 categories)	34	2.18

TABLE V

(E) What change, if any, in local financial policies do you see as necessary to the growth and improvement of community colleges?

		Frequency	Percent
1.	Specifically directed local tax base	14	9.0
2.	Delete local funding	13	8.3
3.	Expand local financing	26	16.7
4.	Legal authority to levy tax without referendum	13	8.3
5.	No involvement of local government in budget approval	9	5.8
6.	Reduce tax burden on local property owners	21	13.5
7.	Local funding arranged appropriately	25	16.0
8.	Other (7 categories)	35	22.5

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